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"B Y R I G H T O F M I G H T."

A PLAY OF TO-DAY IN FOUR ACTS,

BY

M I R O N L E F F I N G W E L L.

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THE CHICAGO MANUSCRIPT CO.,

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1-N.

"THE RIGHT OF MIGHT."

C A S T.

Joseph Gurney-----An electrical expert.
Walter Louderback-----The owner of the Radio Dynamic Works
Lieut. Nelson Louderback-----His son.
William Curdle-----The superintendent.
Raynor Shine-----A rolling stone.

Elsie Gurney-----)
Lucy Gurney-----) Joseph's daughters.
Mrs. Louderback-----Walter's wife.

S Y N O P S I S.
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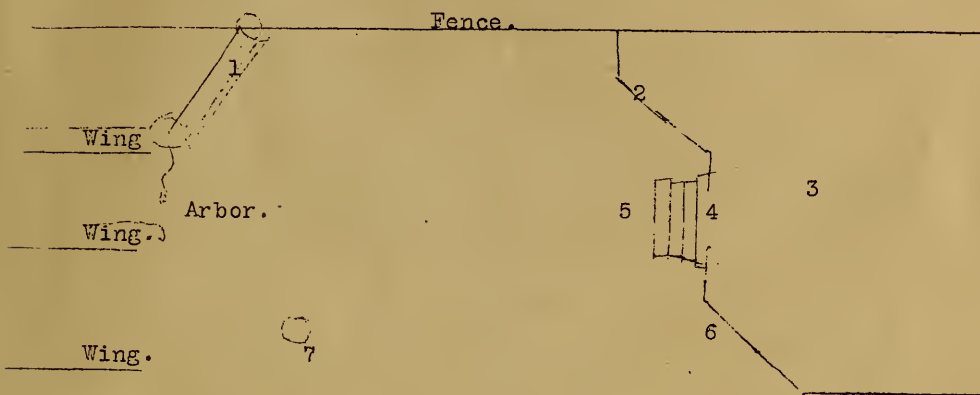
Act 1:----Grounds of the Louderback Mansion.
Act 11:---Joe Gurney's cottage.
Act 111:-- " " "
Act 1V:---Drawing room of the Louderback mansion.

Place:----Philaopolis - an American city.

Time:-----The Present.

-----oooo0000oooo-----

Garden drop.



- (1) Gateway R.U.E. two large statues bearing lights as posts of gateway, which is obliques. Steps and platform lead off R.U.E.
 (2) Window. (3) House. (4) Door. (5) Steps. (6) Window.
 (7) Tree.

Garden and grounds of Walter Louderback's Home. A set as elaborate as possible. A handsome garden drop for backing, but lowers to give the idea of the house and garden terrace in front part of stage is on an elevation. Handsome house with steps leading up to L. of stage. High ornamental iron fence at back. Summer house and arbor effect R. Large tree with seat surrounding it down R. Wood wings. Fill in with flower beds, statues and garden set pieces to give the idea of luxury.

-----oooo0000oooo-----

(At rise the stage is empty. Time, late afternoon.) (The honk-honk of an auto car heard, pause, then enter R.U.E. Walter Louderback and William Curdle, his secretary. Louderback, the magnate, is a well nourished individual of confident and patronizing personality, Curdle is about as old - fifty years - alert and aggressive, gives the impression that although a subordinate, he values his own importance.)

Louderback.

Quite a creditable effort on your part, Curdle. I didn't think it was in you. I couldn't have done better myself.

Curdle.

Thanks. We neither of us had had much chance to "talk politics" in our lives.

Louderback.

"Talking politics" is simply loafing. I am a believer in quick action - that's always been my policy, and that is why I have raised you to your responsible position.

Curdle.

Thanks again! (Ironically.)

Louderback.

You know, the older I get, the more I believe in the doctrine of the right of might. This talk about "Americanism" and

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"sacred independence" in the use of the ballot is all pappy-cock. The natural instinct of the human animal is to work less himself and make the masses labor for him, and by the rule of the survival of the fittest, we who rise and acquire the power are childish - when we persuade where we should command.

Curdle.

That's why I came out bluntly as I did and told them that the horrible Ex Senator Worghum was your choice for governor. Of course he's a grafter, but - oh, what's the use?

Louderback.

Certainly. It would be a waste of time. Never appear to anyone's love when you can appeal to his fear - I don't. It's all right to mask the fist of steel with a velvet glove, but let them know the steel is there. By the way, why wasn't Joe Gurney at the meeting? Didn't you tell him to come?

Curdle.

Oh yes.

Louderback.

What did he say?

Curdle.

He said he was busy.

Louderback.

Busy? At what?

Curdle.

Preparing to measure the comet's tail. Asked for an advance of money for the purpose.

Bouderba,ck.

Why, he's crazy. Does he suppose I'm going to give up my good money for any such fool purpose?

Curdle.

You know what a dreamer Gurney is.

Louderback.

I know he'll be out of a job soon unless he gets busy. I want him to do my work, not waste his time. He ought to discover the perfect insulation before he dies, to be of any value to me.

Curdle.

Suppose he did discover it, and someone else acquired the rights, where would we be? The immense stock we have on hand of dynamos would have to be sent to the scrap pile.

Louderback.

Why, do you mean to insinuate that after all my kindness to him he would be disloyal enough to - rats - didn't I give him a thousand dollars for his first invention?

Curdle.

Yes, and it made you the employer of five thousand men, and I don't know how many times a millionaire.

Louderback.

It isn't your business to know how much I've got.

Curdle.

(Correcting him.) You've had.

Louderback.

Eh?

Curdle.

You've had. What you've had and what you've got - well, that's a different matter. On the whole - if you'll take my advice, be nice to Gurney, just at present - we can't afford to lose him.

Louderback.

There's no man in this world whose place can't be filled.

Curdle.

I grant you, but the man who takes Gurney's place may not be as cheap as Gurney. (Enter Lieut. Nelson Gurney R.U.E.)



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Louderback.

Why, Gurney is as "meek as Moses."

Curdle.

Yes, as "meek as Moses" - but just think what happened to Pharoah and the rest of the Egyptians when Moses got busy.

Louderback.

No scriptural allusion, Curdle, you're apt to get them mixed.

Nelson.

(Coming down B.) You had yours mixed, dad, when you spoke of that strong fellow "Simpson" who took a "mule's jaw bone" and killed five thousand "Philadelphians." What's this about Gurney? How is Joe?

Louderback.

Nelson, when did you get back?

Nelson.

Just now.

Louderback.

You came direct from Washington. How was Senator Sorghum when you left?

Nelson.

As usual, unfit for publication - he had the old "load" on.

Louderback.

See here, I won't have you speak of your future father-in-law in that way.

Nelson.

Oh come now, dad--

Louderback.

I tell you I won't have it - such scandalous language. Why, it would be disrespectful even if--

Nelson.

But isn't it true? And as far as the disrespect goes, what do they say of him even in his own party? Didn't the last president call him a predatory politician whom the malefactors of great wealth--

Curdle.

(Reprovingly.) In which class the Philaopolis Bugle included your father, young man.

Louderback.

(Angrily.) Don't you butt in, Curdle.

Nelson.

No, Curdle, don't, and furthermore, don't "young man" me, I don't like it. Dad, Duleie Sorghum is a sweet girl, and loves someone else, and I don't care for her, but I would have to love her very much to ever consent to take her disreputable grafting old progenitor into my family.

Louderback.

I want you to understand Nelson, this family is not your family yet, but my family. I have encouraged you in habits of extravagance, but I don't propose to give you everything.

Nelson.

Well, there's one thing I won't let you give me, and that is Senator Sorghum. Now let's drop this, and answer my question - what's this about Joe?

Louderback.

Oh, damn Joe.

Nelson.

What - damn Joe? Poor old Joe to whom we owe everything. Oh dad, such scandalous language! To use it about Joe - a genius!

Louderback.

A genius? A mere inventor? A mechanic?

Curdle.

Let me tell you, Lieutenant--

Nelson.

I prefer you wouldn't tell me anything, Curdle.

Curdle.

(Indignantly.) Curdle? Why not Mr? Curdle? Why plain Curdle? Hear me, I merely want to say that a genius is a practical man who although he may not have invented anything himself, has insight courage and shrewdness to recognize the commercial value in another man's invention, and by virtue of capital and energy, acquires it, or--

Nelson.

Steals it.

Curdle.

What? Do you term your father a robber; Lieutenant?

Nelson.

No, Curdle, dad is not a genius, that is, not such as you describe, still if there's anything in heredity, I imagine there must have been some Louderbacks who ploughed the Spanish main. (Seeing Mrs. Louderback who enters from house) How are you, mother? (Going to her and embracing her.)

Mrs. Louderback.

Nelson - what - back from Washington so soon? Well, this is a surprise.

Nelson.

Not an unpleasant one, mother, I hope. Where's Elsie?

Mrs L.

I sent her away half an hour ago on a mission of mercy to the widow of that poor man who was killed last week at the works.

Nelson.

(Affectionately, taking her hands.) You are the same old mother always.

Curdle.

Don't be prodigal in your charity, Mrs Louderback - remember that woman drinks. She is already provided for by the fund, and receives three dollars and seventy five cents a week for herself and child.

Nelson.

Three seventy five? And she drinks? All that money? It's enough to drive her to drink.

Curdle.

I only wish to warn your mother. The contemplation of vice sours the milk of human kindness.

Nelson.

It must have soured yours. No wonder you bear that awful name of "Curdle."

Curdle.

(Indignantly.) Sir: (Nelson ignores him.)

Nelson.

Did she have to go far? (To Mrs L.)

Louderback.

(Impatiently.) Who have to go far?

Nelson.

Elsie, to be sure - Joe Gurney's daughter.

Louderback.

I would prefer you would not speak so familiarly of the young woman, her place is in the house, on any that of a servant - an upper one, to be sure--

Mrs L.

(Protesting timidly.) Why Walter, she's my companion, my secretary.

Louderback.

(Impatiently.) Let me finish. Don't I pay her wages? or you do, but it's with my money. She has here an exalted position for a girl of her class, and she ought to be grateful, but I

propose that the English custom shall be followed in this household of calling all the help by their last or family names as "Wiggins" - my butler, or "Vanderbilt" - my coachman, instead of Percy and Harold, their given names. The English know more about these things.

I see. Come, let's go in, mother. (Leads her to house.)

Excellent idea! It impresses the difference between menial and superior. To call a man by his last name without a handle to it, shows you don't regard him as being in your class.

That's it, Curdle, that's it.

You have the idea exactly, "Curdle" - exactly. (Laughs, exits with Mrs. L. into house.)

Humph:

Way, my boy, has it in for you for something. What is it?

He probably doesn't like the fact that I have paid a few attentions to Joe Gurney's daughter.

Which of his daughters?

Why Elsie, to be sure.

What? You don't mean to say that, man? Have you gone crazy?

Not altogether.

What - would you, my chief man of business, stoop to marry the daughter of one of my workmen?

I might. I could elevate her to my level.

Why, you are as old as I am.

(Quickly.) But better preserved. There are old men, and old men. I don't feel more than twenty nine at times. (Walks around briskly.)

Oh, what a delusion. You are certainly handing me something. But tell me, if you are such a lunatic, why should Nelson feel anything but pity for you?

Because he loves the girl himself.

What? (Roaring.)

That's what brought him back from Washington so soon. I know what I know.

If I thought that, I'd turn her out of the house at once. She dare to even think of becoming a Louderback! I'll talk to him, and I'll talk to her, and when I talk, I say things.

Better not be hasty. Remember the velvet glove.

The velvet glove can go to - to -

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Curdle.

Hush: (Stopping him.) Please don't indulge in profanity before me. I am a decon. Get your son away from the influence of the siren. Get him away, get him away!!

Louderback.

And she would aspire to - my family? I'll get them both away. And to think what that boy has ~~cost~~ cost me since he left West Point - and he could marry a senator's daughter, and he would stoop to--

Curdle.

Have him called back to Washington at once. Use the long distance phone, get Sorghum to go immediately to the war department--

Louderback.

Good: Good: I will, and while he's absent, you marry the girl. Of course she's not up to my family, Curdle, but she's not a bad sort of girl, and she would make you a good wife. You need someone to "prop" your declining years. Yes, she's all right, Curdle, although you did speak of her as a siren.

Curdle.

(Gravely.) As I said before, I am a deacon, and Deacon and Siren seem to be popularly associated.

Joe Gurney.

(Enters R.U.E. - he is in his shirt sleeves, no hat and excited and anxious in manner.) Ah, Mr. Louderback, I'm glad I found you, sir. I have been looking for you at the works. I was here before, and -

Louderback.

Why, what is the matter? What has happened?

Joe.

The Express office will close shortly, sir, and there's an important shipment for me there. I can't go ahead without it. I need fifty dollars--

Louderback.

Go ahead in what?

Joe.

My tests regarding the gases in the comet's tail. I am making an experiment and -

Louderback.

What the devil do I care about the comet's tail?

Joe.

Don't talk that way, Mr. Louderback, it is unholy, we won't have another such a chance in seventy five years. I may not live that long and you know you won't.

Louderback.

Come down to earth, Gurney, come down to earth where I am.

Joe.

I know that you are of the earth, "earthy" so to speak, but you are enveloped by gas at present - we all are - cyanogen from the comet's tail. (Enter Lucy Gurney R.U.E. Raynor Shine following.)

Louderback.

(Seeing her.) Lucy Gurney, you ought to teach your father to take better care of himself and appear more like a sane man and less like a lunatic when he comes here. Curdle, come inside, we must get Senator Sorghum on the phone at once. (Curdle crosses L. to house.)

Joe.

(Detains Louderback who is about to exit by laying his hand on his sleeve.) But the express office - the comet, sir - the comet.

Louderback.

Irritated.) Don't paw me, you'll muss my coat. (Shaking off Joe's hand, brushing himself.) Wake up, Gurney, get down to solid work. Do something for me, your benefactor who gives you your bread, and stop dreaming. Compared with the Radio Dynamic Co., what is a mere measley comet? Think of the good of the firm, Gurney, the good of the firm. (Exits into house followed by Curdle.) (Joe is lost for words and half puzzled, looks after Louderback.)

Lucy.

(Comes behind Joe, takes him by the shoulders, shakes him.)

Joe.

(Turning.) Eh - what? Oh yes, Lucy, it's you.

Lucy.

Yes father, where's your hat?

Joe.

Hat, eh? Why, I've got it on. (Feels head.) No, I haven't.

Lucky.

And your coat.

Joe.

Coat? (Feels arms.) Eh - oh yes, I really don't know where I left it.

Lucy.

Don't you know where you took it off?

Joe.

Lucy, I don't think I know where I put it on.

Lucy.

When did you wear it the last time?

Joe.

Eh - yes - oh yes, I wore it when I went with you.

Lucy.

Yes?

Joe.

To church last Sunday.

Lucy.

Oh dear - dear! How could you come here to Mr. Louderback's in such a state?

Joe.

State? What state?

Lucy.

Look at yourself!

Joe.

What's the matter with me? Are you trying to make a dude of me?

Lucy.

Well, come home.

Joe.

Not yet - I have most important business with Mr. Louder-back.

Lucy.

What is the business?

Joe.

The business is - (Noticing Raynor Shine for the first time) Ahem: I can't tell you - that is - just now. (Mysteriously.)

Raynor.

Am I intruding, Mr. Gurney?

Joe.

Oh bless you, no, Mr. Shine - no, no, no - not at all.

Raynor.

You know I'm deaf, dumb and blind.

Joe.

(Mildly.) Are you? How extraordinary. (Abstractedly.) I never noticed it. (To Lucy.) Now Lucy, there's a good girl, go away - go home, I must see Mr. Louderback and -

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Lucy.

(Looks significantly at Raynor, he exits R.U.E.)

Joe.

There now, I'm ware we have offended that young man. I didn't want to speak before ~~my~~ him - to expose my poverty. He'll think by and by that we haven't very much money. You know, dear, that's what brought me to see Mr. Louderback. I want to make my tests to-night, and -

Lucy.

Listen, father.

Joe.

Yes dear.

Lucy.

Raynor's all right.

Joe.

Is he?

Lucy.

Of course. We saw you leave the house as you are, and Raynor picked up your coat and hat and we brought them after you. We didn't want to give them to you before Mr. Louderback and that horrible Curdle.

Joe.

I'm very glad you didn't. Do you know, Lucy, these people think I'm eccentric.

Lucy.

We guessed you were coming here, but we couldn't catch you. (Raynor Shine re-enters with coat and hat. Lucy takes them.) Thank you, Mr. Shine. Now will you do something for me?

Raynor.

Of course.

Lucy.

Run a back to the house - here's the key - get in and get to the oven as quick as you can.

Raynor.

Get to the oven as quick as I can - yes.

Lucy.

And take that veal pie out. Let me have your pocket comb. (Takes it.)

Raynor.

With pleasure. You know, Lucy, I'd do anything in the world for you. (Going.)

Lucy.

Take care - you may burn your fingers.

Raynor.

Ah, if you but knew the flame in my heart.

Lucy.

If it isn't baked to a cinder, we'll have it for supper.

Raynor.

My heart for supper!

Lucy.

No, calf, the veal pie.

Raynor.

Oh: (Exits R.U.E.)

Lucy.

Father, put on your coat. (Joe does so.) Now sit here and let me fix you up a bit. (Pushes him on to seat by tree.)

Joe.

(Preoccupied.) It's strange that people don't take more interest in what's on every side of them.

Lucy.

Interest, father? (Combing his hair.)

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Joe.

Yes, Louderback spoke most contemptuously of it.

Lucy.

Of what, father?

Joe.

Of the comet's tail. (Plaintively.) Louderback hasn't a soul above insulations or armatures. When I seek some recreation in the dualistic theory and the doctrine of compound radicles, in observing the ratio between oxygen of bases and acids, Louderback thinks I am wasting my time, or as he calls it, his time, because he pays me a salary.

Lucy.

Hold your head still a moment.

Joe.

It's so, though. (Pause.) Ah: (Struck with idea.) I have it! I have it! (Jumps up.)

Lucy.

(Pulls him back.) Sit down.

Joe.

Ouch: Will you be long, Lucy?

Lucy.

Two minutes if you're still, half an hour if you don't. When I get you presentable, you can go in and see Mr. Laudernback like a Christian.

Joe.

You comb my hair too much, Lucy. Of course it's very kind of you, but you comb it altogether too much.

Lucy.

Well, I want you to look nice. You know I'm the little mother of your household - now that Elsie is away, I'm the only one to look after you. (Fixing his collar and tie.)

Joe.

Dear Elsie. (Elsie enters R.U.E.) Do you know, Lucy, a man's awful rich when he's like me and has two such daughters as Elsie and you. I don't know of another man as blessed as I am.

Elsie.

Father: (Coming down to him.)

Joe.

Elsie. Ah my child, come here. Elsie - Lucy - my bairns - both'. Both close - close to my breast. (Hugging them both) Ah, I wouldn't change places with - with - "Nicolo Tesla" himself.

Elsie.

Father, did you come to see me?

Joe.

No Elsie, to be truthful, I didn't come to see you.

Elsie.

What are you doing here then?

Lucy.

Oh, I haven't succeeded in doing anything. I have been quite passive. Lucy your sister has been operating on me. She is trying to make a little Lord Fauntleroy of me.

Elsie.

I just passed Me. Shine - he was hurrying along like mad, he never stopped to speak, but mumbled something about pie, and kept on.

Lucy.

Yes, I sent him to the house to save my pie in the oven and - (Opening bag, she carries.) I declare, instead of the key to the house, I've given him the key of the coal bin. Look after father, Elsie, that Shine fellow if he finds the key won't do, is likely to kick our front door in. (Exit R.U.E.)

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Joe.

Now what do you think of that? Gives him the wrong key. (Chuckling.) And she calls me absent minded! She takes after her old daddy, doesn't she? (Suddenly sobers.) Probably she knew she gave him the wrong key so she could follow him. (Mysteriously.) I am going to tell you a secret - I suspect your sister is fond of that young man.

Elsie.

Why do you think so, father?

Joe.

She bosses him so, walks over him as if he were a door mat. Oh, I know all the signs, that's the way your mother treated me. But he's a fine young fellow, Elsie, with a great talent for electrical dynamics. Not as keen on chemistry as I would like to see one of his age, but he has a very good head nevertheless.

Elsie.

I thought he was agent for some land speculators, Nelson, Lieut. Louderback told me he was. They are great friends, ~~xx~~ were at West Point, together, but Mr. Shine didn't complete the course. Isn't he a civil engineer.

Joe.

He was, but his natural bent of mind is toward electricity. Well, anyway I have accepted him as my pupil and hope to make something of him. (Plaintively.) If he takes Lucy away from me, though, I shall be all alone in the old house.

Elsie.

Father, would you like me to come back to the old house and live with you always?

Joe.

Live with me always? Of course I should like it for my own sake, but you must think of yourself, my dear. We must both think of your future. I am such a thoughtless, careless old fellow. All the money I get goes somewhere as soon as I get it. I don't know where it goes, but it goes somewhere.

Elsie.

Father, I'm glad you don't like money.

Joe.

But I do like it, I'm very fond of it, and I should like to be rich so that I could have everything I want to carry on my experiments, but I shall always be poor. I ~~am~~ happy in knowing that you are here. I know that Mrs. Louderback who is an angel of goodness, loves you, and your future is ~~an~~ in a way provided for. Here you will no doubt, meet some good substantial man of business, whom you can respect and marry.

~~Mr.~~ Elsie.

Don't let us speak of that, but tell me of your work. You say, father, you didn't come here to-day to see me.

Joe.

No, I came to see Mr. Louderback. (Re-enter Curdle from house.) You see, Elsie, I needed fifty dollars to get some material out of the express office, and - (Seeing Curdle.) Oh Mr. Curdle, don't you think Mr. Louderback would be at liberty to receive me now? You can see I am what they call quite presentable. (Indicating his appearance.)

Curdle.

(Looks him over.) I think Mr. Louderback might receive you now. Why don't you come in and try?

Joe.

Thank you, I will.

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Curdle.

I'll wait here for you. Let me know what he says - if he refuses, we may find a way.

Joe.

That's mighty good of you to say so.

Curdle.

I'll wait here and Miss Elsie shall keep me company, if she will.

Joe.

(Heartily.) Why, of course she will, won't you dear? I won't be gone long. (Exits into house.)

Curdle.

Elsie, have you thought over what I said?

Elsie.

Mr. Curdle, I haven't, to be truthful, given it a thought. The matter was closed at our last talk. It is a buried subject. Don't let us try to revive it.

Curdle.

I thought you were a serious minded person - you are romantic. Do you expect love in a husband?

Elsie.

Mostwomen do.

Curdle.

I'm a plain business man and talk in a plain business way. I do not offer love, because there is no one in the world I could love better than I love myself.

Elsie.

I believe you.

Curdle.

You see I am a frank. I would want our union to be one of sound sense. Love and marriage have nothing to do with each other. Love is all excitement, marriage ought to be all calm. Marriage means a home, a family, a place to bring up children in peace and tranquillity. Love is insanity, marriage is sanity - love is--

Elsie.

What do you know about love. You acknowledge - nothing. Then why profane its sacred name? Do you suppose a woman who had any ideals whatsoever would honestly marry you on the terms you offer? I know of none.

Curdle.

(Calmly) Yourself.

Elsie.

Myself? Why my dear Mr. Curdle, I wouldn't marry you on any terms at all, even if you had what you lack - lack oh, so tremendously - warmth of affection. I might respect you, but my hand goes with my heart and could only be given to the man I love.

Curdle.

Love is a disease - marriage is solid, solid health.

Elsie.

I think your ideas are horrible.

Curdle.

Don't pursue a phantom.

Elsie.

Don't worry yourself, I would flee from one - a hideous one - so I will bid you good afternoon. (Starts to go into house.)

Curdle.

(Intercepts her.) Can't you realize that this dream of yours is wicked folly? Would you rather be the playing of an idle hour than an honest man's wife? Young Louderback - (Pauses)

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Elsie.

Mr. Curdle, I think you are going too far.

Curdle.

It is settled that he is to marry the senator's daughter - what can he do for you? Would you break your father's heart and cover him would disgrace? Louderback would drive him out in his old age, penniless, to find another way of making a living. Are you willing to have his misery pay the price for your mad infatuation?

Elsie.

Have you finished?

Curdle.

Oh no, I can say more. It is a business principle with me to always hold a reserve in everything. I never play my last card, I never spend my last dollar, and I repeat that whatever he may say to the contrary, that Lieut. Louderback and his father definitely settled to-day that he shall marry Senator Sorghum's daughter.

Joe.

(Outside.) Then you won't do it, sir?

Louderback.

(Outside.) I certainly will not - not a cent - not a cent.

(Pause, Joe re-enters from house L.)

Joe.

(Crestfallen.) It's no use, no use.

Curdle.

Mr. Louderback refused, Joe?

Joe.

Yes, yes. Elsie - I - I think I'll go home.

Curdle.

Stay, Joe. You said the material would cost fifty dollars,?
(Nelson in doorway.)

Joe.

Yes.

Curdle.

Well, if you promise to keep it a secret just among us three, not let Mr. Louderback know, I will lend you the money.

Joe.

You will?

Curdle.

Yes.

Elsie.

(Interposing.) Father, don't accept money from that man.

Curdle.

Eh?

Joe.

Elsie:

Elsie.

I repeat, don't take his money unless you want to distress me.

Curdle.

Oho, my lady, so that's the tone we take, eh? Thenwar be it, and we'll see who will win.

Nelson.

(Coming down.) You won't, Curdle, that's a certainty. I can see you already licked to a frazzle. Joe, Elsie's right - Curdle's money's "tainted." Here, borrow from your friend. (Stuffs bills into Joe's hand.) Get along to that express office before it closes up.

Elsie.

Father - don't - don't.

14--N.

Nelson.

Hurry up, Woe, you've only five minutes.

Elsie.

Nelson - please - Lieutenant Louderback - father - listen to me. (Joe bewildered, turns from one to the other.)

Nelson.

Don't do it, Joe, Remember the comet's tail. (Hurries off Joe.) (Turns to Curdle.) Now Curdle, a word with you. Your unpleasant personality has been exaggerated of late. You're obnoxious, you are superfluous - you are excrescent. I don't want to tell the dog catchers about you, but patience has its limits, that's all. (Looks at Curdle who does not answer, but slowly exits into house L. looking back.) Elsie: (She comes to him, he embraces her.) He's been annoying you again. Don't worry, dear, it won't be for long.

Elsie.

Nelson, You shouldn't have given father that money.

Nelson.

Dad and I owe your father more than we will ever be able to pay.

Elsie.

But don't you see it looks like -

Nelson.

Patience, dear heart, patience. We will soon be able to stand hand in hand together and face the world as man and wife.

Elsie.

Your father's anger will be terrible. It will mean your disinheritance and my father's ruin. That man Curdle told me so.

Nelson.

My disinheritance is the least of all I fear. There are powerful reasons why our union should be kept a secret one, Elsie. Danger menaces my father also. You can't understand at present you must not try to understand, but trust me, dear, and all will come out all right.

Louderback.

(Enters from house, sees them together, comes C.) Miss Gurvey, my wife demands your presence. (Pause, she does not move.) Do you hear, Miss? Mrs. Louderback is waiting for you.

Elsie.

Yes sir. (Exits slowly into house.)

Louderback.

Now sir, can you explain this?

Nelson.

It explains itself.

Louderback.

What - that you would play the blackguard and libertine under the roof which shelters your mother?

Nelson.

I am neither a blackguard nor a libertine, and your inference not only insults me; but the lady who has just left us.

Louderback.

I can't afford a public scandal here, you know that. If you wish to entertain a mistress, have her domiciled away from this town.

Nelson.

Ah, you are willing that I should be a scoundrel, but that I should keep my vices hidden.

Louderback.

I wouldn't have you brazen them out where they will harm my reputation.

Nelson.

Your reputation shall never suffer through any act of mine, and my life shall always be open to the light of day.

15-N.

Louderback.

Then what do you propose to do with Gurney's daughter?

Nelson.

What any honorable man would do with the woman whom he loves and who loves him, marry her, of course.

Louderback.

What - marry the daughter of one of my workmen?

Nelson.

Marry the daughter of the man to whom you owe everything.

Louderback.

You know how I am involved with Senator Sorghum.

Nelson.

I know that in his cups he boasts that you are completely in his power - I know he hints that if you forsake him, you are likely to go to prison for bribery

Louderback.

Hush: Hush: Hush: (Fearfully looking around.)

Nelson.

And you would have me marry the daughter of this man - a girl who loves another. You would wreck four lives because you and this rum soaked political parasite have common interests in finance and robbery of the people, and because you fear he is a conscienceless Judas and will betray you. You demand this sacrifice of me. Well, I will not make it.

Louderback.

And I will force you.

Nelson.

You haven't the power.

Louderback.

We'll see.

Nelson.

We shall see. I am willing that matters shall remain in abeyance for the present. Dulcie Sorghum and I understand each other perfectly. To this world we will seem an engaged couple until you can find the means to buy your freedom from this incumbus which threatens you, but remember this, while I will try and do my loyal duty as a son, don't you try to juggle with my heart's dearest wishes, the wishes centered in the girl I love - the girl who will be my wife.

Mrs. Louderback.

(Enters from house followed by Elsie and Curdle.) Oh my boy, my boy, are they going to send you away from me - so far - so far?

Nelson.

Why, what is the matter, mother. Elsie, what is it?

Mrs. Louderback.

(Clings to him, sobbing.) The long distance phone from Washington - the war department - (Elsie crosses the stage sadly, sinks on seat by tree.)

Nelson.

The war department - yes?

Mrs. Louderback.

Tell him, Mr. Curdle, tell him.

Curdle.

From what I could understand, you are to await orders here by telegraph to return to Washington, and there be assigned to immediate active service in the Philippines. (Turns to Louderback, aside.) Senator Sorghum has lost no time.

Louderback.

No.

Nelson.

There, there, mother, don't worry. Remember, when we work for Uncle Sam, we must go where Uncle Sam sends us. Dad, take

16-N.

care of "mam." (Goes over to Elsie, embracing her.) Courage, my darling, courage, courage and all will be well. (Releasing her, she sinks half fainting on bench. Raynor Shine and Lucy re-enter, Lucy goes to Elsie.) (Calling Ray aside.) Ray. If I am called away, Elsie may need a friend. (Glances at Curdle and Louderback.) You understand?

Ray.

You bet.

Nelson.

I'll go to the phone and find out the facts of this. (Going toward house.)

Joe.

(Entering R.U.) I've been to the express office, everything's all right. Lieutenant, I don't know how to thank you. I'll be able to work to-night. (Seeing Elsie in tears.) Why, what's the matter, Elsie? What is it, dear? (She is sobbing on Lucy's shoulder, he looks around inquiringly.)

Curdle.

(Advancing.) I will tell you, Joe.

Ray.

(Takes Curdle by arm, forcibly leads him down L.) When Miss Gurney is ready, she'll tell him herself.

Curdle.

Sir - I - (Trying vainly to free his arm.)

Raynor.

Not a word. (Low and intense.) If you try to wound him, or hurt her good name, I'll break your damned face.)

PICTURE

C U R T A I N .
w w w w w w w w

xLoud.

x Mrs L.

Nelson

x in door

Joe

x

x Elsie.

Lucy x

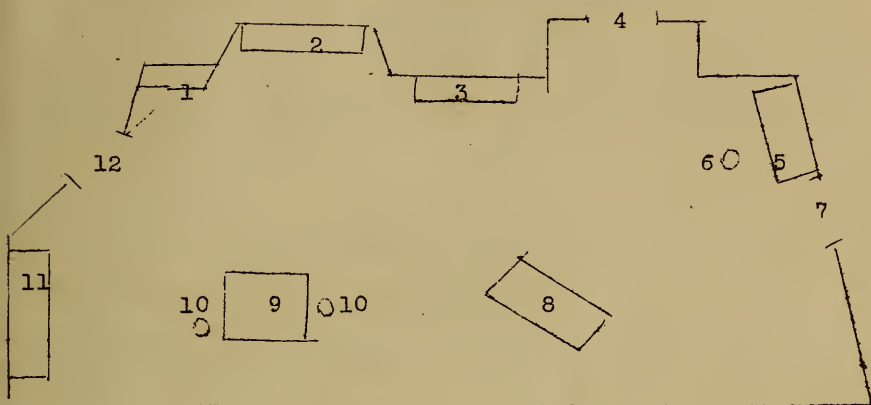
x Ray.

x Curdle.

-----ooooo0000oooo-----

A C T II.

Two weeks later. Sitting room in the Gurney cottage. A cozily furnished interior. Late afternoon.



- (1) Cupboard R. of window. (2) Window, with window seat.
 (3a) Book case. (4) Door. (5) Upright piano. (6) Stool. (7) Door.
 (8) Sofa. (9) Table. (10) Chairs. (11) Fireplace.
 (12) Door. Pictures and cushions and rugs to decorate set.

-----oooo0000oooo-----

Elsie.

(At rise, Lucy is discovered at window at back looking out. Pause, Elsie appears in door L.) Lucy.

Lucy.

(Turning.) Elsie, dear.

Elsie.

Has the letter carrier made his rounds yet?

Lucy.

Here he passed on the other side five minutes ago. He has nothing for us to-night. (Elsie sighs, apparently about to withdraw.) Don't go back and mope by yourself, dear, come out here. I need your comfort.

Elsie.

What is it, Lucy?

Lucy.

That dreadful Raynor Shine. We have quarreled again.

Elsie.

What was it this time?

Lucy.

What is it all the time? He treats me like a child. I know he can do things and will do things, but he don't seem to admit me into his confidence or ask my advice. All he seems to want to do is to hold my hand and look mushy. Our meetings are conducted on the silent system, and I always seem to know just what he's going to say before he says it. I want surprises in my life, excitement, sensation.

Elsie.

Ah Lucy, can't you see he is your devoted slave, he worships you.

2-N.

Lucy.

It's easy for you to talk, you have been out in the world, living with the Louderbacks, while I've been here like a bump on a log. You have seen life and have met all sorts of men.

Elsie.

And my experience makes me esteem the honesty and virtues all the more of a man like Raynor Shine.

Lucy.

But he is prematurely fossilized. Oh Elsie, father must have been just such another at his age. Wouldn't it be dreadful if Raynor with his studies became a scientific crank and grew old like father?

Elsie.

For shame, Lucy.

Lucy.

Oh, father is the best of fathers, he's a grand old man, but I wouldn't like his kind of a husband.

Elsie.

Has Raynor asked you to be his wife?

Lucy.

He takes it for granted, he assumes it as all settled. He is bland and child like in his perfect confidence - ugh, the idiot.

Elsie.

Let me give you a piece of advice. Be his wife, Lucy, and thank God with all your heart for giving you a man who loves you so that he becomes as a fool in his presence. His mute adoration conceals no deception, while burning protestations of affection, oaths of fidelity and caresses often mask a heart that has grown indifferent, a passion that has grown cold.

Lucy.

Elsie, I never heard you speak like that. What do you know of these things?

Elsie.

I know that perfect love is perfect trust, and perfect trust is a dream of contented happiness, but when the demon of doubt rouses us from the dream, the awakening is most bitter.

Lucy.

You frighten me Elsie. What has happened to you, dear - tell me, your sister, won't you?

Elsie.

I have nothing to tell.

Lucy.

You have been away from the Louderbacks two weeks now. When do you intend to return?

Elsie.

I do not intend to return.

Lucy.

Why not?

Elsie.

Don't ask me, Lucy.

Lucy.

But I have a right to know. Old Louderback is a bear but Mrs. Louderback thought all the world of you. I can't understand why you have refused to see her, she's been here a half dozen times and I have blushed and stammered and - she must have known I was lying when I made excuses and wouldn't let her in, and Father too - he -

Joe.

(Outside-) Come in, Ray, come in. Never mind about the girls - you won't have to meet either of them if you don't want to.

I know how you feel about Lucy, her head is filled with sawdust - yes, not an idea above her pots and pans. (Shows himself on door upper L. turning back.) I couldn't make her understand even Poggendorf's theory of transition resistance. Come on, if she annoys us, we'll go into the laboratory and bar her out. (Reaches out, takes Ray by arm, drags him on, they come down stage together.) How are you, Lucy dear? I was just speaking of you. What, Elsie - you up? You're feeling well again, eh? Well, I'm glad. I've brought Mr. Shine in with me, we are going to try a few experiments. He's been giving me an awful talking to. He's been scolding me as I deserve. What do you think he said? Said I was a fool - yes he did. But I am not going to be a fool any longer. I'm going to make me a big fortune, my dear, a big fortune for you and Lucy. Now tell me, what would you like me to buy you when you are rich?

Elsie.

Oh, I don't know. What would you like to buy yourself?

Joe.

I would like to buy everything that is beautiful - a beautiful house, beautiful dresses for you to wear, silk and embroidery, satin and laces and furs and cambrics, soft and white - white like your soul, my Elsie. When we are rich, you must wear nothing but white.

Elsie.

Yes but father, what will you buy for yourself?

Joe.

Oh, don't bother about me. I shall spend it all on you and Lucy. You shall have everything your hearts desire - a new home, to begin with.

Joe.

With a corner in it for me, unless perhaps, who knows? You may want your new home with somebody else.

Elsie.

Oh no, no.

Joe.

Don't you be too sure of that, some fine fellow will come along, and take ~~max~~ you away.

Elsie.

Oh no, no, that is quite impossible. (Bus. during this scene, Lucy and Ray have been conversing at back, she points to her head as if accusing him of what her father had charged in regard to what it is stuffed with, he acts in a deprecatory manner, she lays down the law and snatches a newspaper from his hand which he carries folded up, he endeavors to regain it)

Lucy.

You are simply impossible, you are not entertaining, I am going to read.

Ray.

I wish you wouldn't.

Lucy.

I will, go to the laboratory with father.

Joe.

Yes, come with me, Ray. Oh, by the way, I just passed old Markham. He seems quite aged and broken since his daughter went away. I don't wonder at it. I would have died if I had been in his face.

P Lucy.

Poor Elsie Markham, she carried her secret to the grave.

Joe.

It is a mercy that her shame is hidden there, and yet, who knows - why should I say that? Who knows the truth about her? Who knows? But what the villain who tempted her, is all, all to blame. (Musingly.) And her name was Elsie too.

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REIGN OF CHARLES THE FIRST, KING OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND IRELAND, WAS PRINTED IN THE YEAR 1649.
AND THE SECOND PART OF THE SAME HISTORY, IN THE
YEAR 1650. THE THIRD PART OF THE SAME HISTORY,
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4-N.

Elsie.

Yes, her name was Elsie too.

Joe.

But how different from my Elsie. (Noticing that Elsie is in tears.) Here, here - come, this won't do, this won't do. We won't grieve about the creature, she must have been a worthless thing to make her father a jeer and scorn among his neighbors, to bow his head in shame and break his heart. Oh by the way, dear, do you know why Ray here gave me fits just now? I was just telling him about Curdle. Elsie, do you know Curdle is a traitor to the firm? He made me a most insulting proposition, didn't he, Ray?

Ray.

He did indeed. The amount he offered was most insulting.

Joe.

Oh, I'm not speaking of the amount.

Ray.

I am - to give him the entire option on your possible patents for the next five years for any such money - I regard as the gravest kind of insult to your human intelligence.

Joe.

Ray said he was a common "mucker".

Ray.

Worse than that.

Joe.

I told him Mr. Louderback had always been a good boss to me, had most always advanced me money to carry on my experiments, and I think I ought to give him the first chance.

Ray.

(Hotly.) You ought to give him a rope and tell him to go hang himself - damn him.

Lucy.

(Looking up from paper.) What's this? What's this? Raynor Shine, I am surprised.

Ray.

I beg pardon ladies, for my vigorous language.

Lucy.

Don't - don't weaken, I beg - go on - I rather like this side of your character. You are not as much of a "jelly fish" as I supposed.

Elsie.

(Reprovingly.) Lucy:

Ray.

Heaven knows I don't approve of Curdle or any of his kind - I detest treachery in any form. Louderback is entitled to fair play, but Mr. Gurney owes it to himself and to you girls that he receive a fair price for his work. But for his genius, the Radio dynamic Co. would not exist as it does to-day. Its stock has mounted into millions, all right - very good. Your father made a contract, accepted a price, was satisfied at the time - a legitimate transaction. He has no right to go behind the returns or complain.

Joe.

I don't complain, I have never complained.

Ray.

But the future is another thing. Don't mortgage that for a song. Get the worth of your work, that's what I mean. Share in the prosperity, the wealth you will help others to acquire. Don't be bamboozled, don't be buncoed. They'll hand it to you if they can, they'll own you body and soul, a slaving drudge whose very heart blood they will coin drop by drop into dollars and laugh to themselves to think how easy you are.

5-N.

Joe.

But I feel kindly toward Louderback - for his son's sake, if not for his own. Just think how that boy came to my help when I got mixed up with the comet's tail. He's a fine fellow, is Nelson.

Lucy.

Well, what do you think of that? (Shaking newspaper.) Talk of the d---here's his name in the paper. What do you think he's been doing?

Ray.

(Whispers to her.) Don't tell it, now - don't. Don't.

Lucy.

(Blurting out.) Why not? Why shouldn't I tell it? It's an important event.

Joe.

What is it, Lucy?

Lucy.

He's been getting married.

Joe.

Married? Well - well - well - how did it happen?

Lucy.

(Readsing.) Special from Washington. "Runaway match - Dulcie, the beautiful daughter of Senator Sorghum gave Washington society a shock yesterday by eloping with Lieutenant Nelson Louderback. They were married in Baltimore. The Lieutenant who is the only son and heir of Walter Louderback, the noted millionaire of Philaopolis, has been ordered to the department of the Philippines. It is not known whether his bride will accompany him. Senator Sorghum refused to be interviewed last night."

Joe.

Well, well, well, we all wish him joy. Let me see the paper.

Ray.

(Has gone over to Elsie, whispers.) Courage: Courage: The report may be false.

Elsie.

Why do you say that?

Ray.

Because I know my man, I have faith in my friend and I can't - I won't believe him to be a blackguard and a liar.

Joe.

(Laying down newspaper.) We must write a letter of congratulation to Nelson. That is, you shall write it, Elsie, in all our names. Here I am gossiping and idling about as if I hadn't anything to do. I must get down to practical things. Louderback is always after me about that perfect insulation. I wonder if it ~~is~~ will ever be discovered in our time. Come on, Ray.

Lucy.

Presently, father. I have use for Mr. Shine here.

Joe.

Eh? (At door.)

Lucy.

We haven't had any supper yet.

Joe.

That's a fact. Do you know, that reminds me I didn't eat anything since breakfast.

Lucy.

What? And I fixed such a nice lunch for you to take to the works with you.

Joe.

I'm afraid I was busy and forgot all about it, Lucy, I'm sorry. I'll try and remember it to-morrow.

6-N.

Ray.
What can I do for you, Miss Lucy?
Lucy.

You expect to stay to supper, don't you?

Ray.
If you ask me to stay, why - I'll -
Lucy.

Yes? (Inquiringly.)

Ray.
I'll stay to oblige you.

Lucy.
And if I don't ask you to stay?

Ray.
I'll stay to spite you.

Lucy.
Will you saw and split some wood.

Ray.
I'll saw wood and say nothing.

Lucy.
I don't keep a fire in the range this weather. Wait - let me give you the axe.

Ray.
What - do you keep the axe in the sitting room?

Lucy.
Yes, there's no lock on the wood shed and they stole the old one. Be sure and bring it back after you have finished. (Goes to cupboard at back, produces axe, gives it to him, she exits L)

Joe.
After you get through, come into the laboratory, Ray, I'll show you something interesting. (Exits R.)

Ray.
(Goes over to Elsie who is on sofa L.) Don't give way, Elsie, don't give way. Why, I tell you that paper is as yellow as they make them. Tell me, what did Nelse say in his last letter to you?

Elsie.
He hasn't sent me a line since he went away.

Ray.
Why not say you haven't received a line? Didn't he know you purposed returning to your father's home?

Elsie.
No, he begged me to remain with his mother.

Ray.
He may have written to remain with his mother. He may have written to the Louderback house and his letters have been suppressed.

Elsie.
Oh, Mr. Louderback would never do that, that would be dishonest.

Ray.
Yes, it would be dishonest, but - well, no matter. And you have had no letter at all, in the last two weeks?

Elsie.
No, not from anyone I know. I have had a dozen anonymous ones, cowardly in their attacks, concerning my relations with Nelse.

Ray.
Anonymous, eh? The hounds.

Elsie.
They have nearly driven me mad. I have not dared to tell father. The implied disgrace would make him frantic. Evil tongues have been busy, too. I find myself coldly greeted on every hand.

7-N.

Ray.

Your imagination.

Elsie.

Oh no, I am not the kind to imagine slights where none is intended. I waited patiently for some word from Nelson to comfort me, and to-day I read that he is lost to me forever. Mr. Shine, I must go away from here at once - I must, for father and sister's sake, if not for my own. (Knock on door L.U.E.) Who is that, I wonder? (Ray goes up and opens door)

Louderback.

(Enters L.U.E.) Miss Gurney:

Elsie.

Mr. Louderback - you wish to see my father?

Louderback.

Oh no, I see enough of him at the works. My visit this afternoon is to you, if - if - (Looking at Ray.)

Ray.

Certainly, I have some wood to split. (Exits with axe L.)

Louderback.

(Takes seat.) Yes, I wanted a word or two with you, Miss Gurney. I thought it better to speak with you, here. Of course, under the circumstances, your return to your position in my house is impossible.

Elsie.

Quite impossible, sir.

Louderback.

I have tried to make my wife understand it without telling her the whole facts.

Elsie.

What facts, sir?

Louderback.

Are you going to force me to be brutally frank. Do you know that your conduct with my son is a matter of town talk? I am sorry that Nelse has been so reckless, because when a girl loses her good name, she loses her dearest possession.

Elsie.

And you mean that I have lost mine, Mr. Louderback?

Louderback.

The knowledge has only come to me of late. A father, it seems, is always the last to hear these things. Gossip has been very busy, it appears. Mind, I don't believe all I have heard, I only think you have been a trifle indiscreet, but slander is naturally voracious and eagerly snaps every unsavory morsel as it can, and then gorges itself.

Elsie.

don't endeavor to get picturesque, Mr. Louderback. What is the object of your visit to me?

Louderback.

To advise you.

Elsie.

Then come down to facts. What is your advice?

Louderback.

That you should leave here at once. You have read the evening paper, you have seen the announcement of Nelse's marriage. Do you want to remain and brazen out your - to put it mildly, your ambiguous position. You will be the laughing stock of everyone, you will be regarded as my son's "light of love" whom he has abandoned. You will bring disgrace to your father's house, you will bring ruin and poverty to your father, for I will no longer retain him in his position if you remain. If you are absent for a time, the affair will blow over. I will provide for your expenses elsewhere until you can get employment - here, let me give you some money now. (Producing bills)

8-N.

Elsie.

Don't insult me with that, I wouldn't take a penny of your money.

Louderback.

Ahn then you are determined to remain?

Elsie.

No, I am going away.

Louderback.

Ah, I am glad you see the wisdom of what I say.

Elsie.

What you say has had nothing to do with my determination. My mind was made up before you intruded here.

Louderback.

Ahem: (Coughs.) Well, where do you purpose going?

Elsie.

That is my own affair. It cannot possibly concern you or yours

Elsie.

When do you go?

Elsie.

Immediately.

Louderback.

What explanation will you make to your father?

Elsie.

(Overcome with emotion.) My father - my dear, good kind father. I - I will send him a message begging him to withhold his judgement, all censure of me, until Heaven in its mercy shall temper this trial to us both, and time shall remove all blot from his daughter's name. (Pause.) You have fulfilled your mission, Mr. Louderback, now I will beg you to leave me.

Louderback.

I presume I may rely on your not mentioning my son's name to him.

Elsie.

Do you think it possible that I could?

Louderback.

You are a very foolish girl not to make some money from me. You would make my conscience feel much easier. However, I wish you luck. If you should fall into straits and need anything, you can write me. (Pause - exits L. at back.)

Elsie.

My father's words about Elsie Markham - "It would have killed me if it had been my daughter. It's a mercy that her shame was hidden in the grave." I must go away - I must disappear - at once - at once. Lucy shall bear my message to my father. I dare not trust myself to say farewell to him. God bless you, father, God bless you. May he in his justice set all right and bring us together soon, never to be separated again - never again. (Exits L.2.E.) (Re-enter Ray with axe L.U.E. followed by Louderback.) I will prove the truth of what I say.

Louderback.

But sir--

Ray.

(Lays down axe against cup board door.) Hush: Stop - look - listen. (Goes to window at back, opens it suddenly, discloses Curdle behind it.) Behold your rubber necked superintendent. You slimy, hypocritical, canting, measley mutt, come in - come in. We want to hear you lie out of this. (Drags him through the window on to the stage.)

Curdle.

Sir, this violence and these vulgar epithets you apply to me--

Ray.

They're nothing to what's coming to you.

9-N.

Curdle.

Mr. Louderback, will you uphold this ruffian? You know my sensitive and delicate nature, it feels acutely the stab of every one of his cruel and brutal words.

Louderback.

Were you eavesdropping, Curdle?

Curdle.

No sir - that is, not intentionally. I happened at the window by accident, and---

Ray.

Stayed there some fifteen minutes.

Louderback.

Curdle! (Severely.) What I want you to know I will tell you, but if I discover that you are attempting to learn aught of my affairs, which I wish kept secret - I will crush you as I would crush anyone - like an egg shell.

Curdle.

Your crushing days are pretty nearly over, Louderback. Don't threaten me and don't try to frighten me. I've got your number and you are pretty nearly a dead one.

Louderback?

What's this? What's this? Curdle, you are discharged.

Curdle.

My resignation is already in your office. I have disposed of the stock I held in the Radio Dynamic company, and I am through with it and you. No one knows better than I that your firm is on its last legs. You can't bully me any more. You've done it for years. Dollar for dollar, I think I can show more real money now than you can.

Louderback.

Why, I am paralyzed. I never knew this miserable object to use such words before. He must have gone insane. What can it mean?

Ray.

It means that rats desert a sinking ship - you are the ship and Curdle here is a rat - which of course goes without saying.

Louderback.

Curdle, I will drive you out of Philaopolis.

Curdle.

Louderback, you will do nothing of the kind. There has been a new company formed of which I am to be the superintendent. We are going to compete with you and fight you tooth and nail. It's war between us - war - war.

Ray.

When thieves fall out, honest men get their dues. I suppose both of you gentlemen will bid for Joe Gurney.

Louderback and Curdle.

Joe Gurney!

Lucy.

Father: Father: Come out - come out - (Beats on door R.) Come out for mercy's sake.

Joe.

(Entering.) What is it - Lucy?

Lucy.

Elsie has gone.

Joe.

Gone? I don't understand. Gone? Why, she was here a short while ago. Where has she gone?

Lucy.

She would not say - she has left our home - left you, father and me, she's gone away from this wicked town with its cruel lies and slander.

Joe.

Slanders - about my Elsie? One of God's angels! Why, who would dare breathe one word against her? Tell me who it is, and old as I am, I would strangle him with my own hands.

Curdle.

You can't fight the whole city. Your daughter's name has been coupled with a man who is of proud and honored position, but by the blood of inheritance and by his own nature, is a scoundrel.

Ray.

Curdle, you are a damned liar.

Joe.

Who is the man - his name - who is he?

Curdle.

His father stands there. (Points to Louderback.) It is his son, Nelson who has taken advantage of your daughter's position in this Louderback home to drag her name into the mire. Let him deny it if he can.

Louderback.

Gurney, I am very sorry - deeply sorry -

Joe.

Then it's true? And you kept it back from me.

Louderback.

Gurney, I never realized how things were going until two weeks ago, and then I hurried Nelson away.

Joe.

You knew, and you hurried him away. Ah, you wanted to save him from my revenge - you! You! -

Curdle.

Go on, Joe, don't spare him. You made him rich and now his son robs you of your flesh and blood.

Joe.

Two weeks ago, that was the day he gave me the money. Ah: (Shrieks.) His money! The price of my child - the innocence of my child! Oh Elsie, Elsie - oh that I had died rather than this - my girl, my darling! (Breaking down.)

Louderback.

Come, come, Gurney, don't give way like this. I will see what I can do.

Joe.

What can you do? What can that spawn of the devil whom you call son do? I see that he has taken him a wife. A wife! (Grabbing up newspaper.) And my poor child, she is gone - an outcast from her father's care - a wanderer, no one knows where. I only want her back - I wouldn't care if she had sinned again and again, I only want to hold her next my heart and say - "Rest here on your father's breast - he loves you and will protect you against the whole world. Innocent or guilty, he loves you." Help me to get her back - help me, I say.

Louderback.

I wish I could - but I am powerless.

Curdle.

Don't believe it, Joe, he ~~coaxed~~ her to leave, offered her money to go. I overheard him - I will have search made for her, Joe.

Joe.

(Hysterically.) Whoever restores my child to me, I'll work for the rest of my life. I will starve - I will slave my fingers to the bone - every inspiration of my brain, every hour of my days shall be his.

Ray.

Courage, Joe - courage! She will return, I am sure - but in the meantime, trust neither of these men.

11-N.

Joe.

(Kneeling.) Oh hear, hear - thou who holdest the scales of justice in thy hands. Judge between those who have injured my poor child and me - a balance - a balance! May they suffer as they are making me suffer. Give me the power to wring their hearts with sorrow as they have wrung mine.

Louderback.

I will make atonement, Joe. You shall be advanced, but I can't do the impossible. I can't undo Nelson's marriage with the Senator's daughter. You read the dispatch from Washington.

Ray.

A fake!

Louderback.

Eh? What?

Ray.

A bare faced fake inspired by you and slipped into the columns of that paper because of your pull. It is part of your clumsy scheme to win your point.

Louderback.

I'll make you prove your charge. (Nelson Louderback enters L.U.E.)

Ray.

My proof is here, your son himself who will denounce the lie.

Joe.

He! He here! God has delivered him into my hands that I may take my revenge! (Grabs axe and rushes on Nelson.)

Lucy.

(Clinging to him.) Father: Father:

Ray.

(Struggles with Joe, disarms him.) Joe - Joe! Stop - stop! What you would do is a crime!

Joe.

It is an act of justice.

Nelson.

What does this mean?

Ray.

It means that you have viläy slandered Nelson, by one who ought to hold your honor dear and it's up to you to nail the lie. Did you marry Senator Sorghum's dagghter?

Nelson.

No, that dispatthh was false, it wronged the lady and myself. There is but one woman I love, and that is Elsie Gurney, and I'll marry her or stay forever single. Where is she? Where is Elsie?

Joe.

Gone - gone - gone!

Nelson.

Gone? Gone where?

Lucy.

She left by the east bound train half an hour ago. She would not say where she was going.

Nelson.

But why - why did she leave?

Lucy.

She was distracted by the cruel slanders and wanted to spare Father and myself the feproach of her presence - the shame -

Nelson.

Reproach? Shame? Elsie, my Elsie, as pure as an angel - why, who would dare breathe a word against her? Ah: (To Louderback.) This is your work. You have proved traitor to our compact. In your thirst for power you would trample on the noblest feelings. You would break the heart of the girl I love, and make her a homeless wanderer among strangers - you would plunge her father

12-N.

and family into misery and shame, and you would provoke me, your son, to forget all filial duty, to renounce you forever and pray to the eternal God that I may never look upon your face again. (Pause.) "The East bound train" you said, Lucy? Comfort your father - I will follow, I will find Elsie and bring her back to you.

Louderback.

But your orders for the Philippines, your duty to the government?

Nelson.

My duty to humanity, my respect for my own manhood calls me now. They overweigh everything else. Now to find what ticket Elsie bought for the east bound train.

Mrs. Louderback.

(Enters hurriedly L.U.E.) Walter - Walter - are you here? The whole town is in an up roar, a terrible accident has occurred. They are searching everywhere for you. (Murmurs outside.)

Louderback.

Accident? Where - at the works?

Mrs. Louderback.

No, at the railroad bridge, through a mistake the draw was opened and the east bound train which left here a little while ago plunged into the river. They fear not a passenger escaped. (Cry of horror from everyone.) Come Walter - come.

Louderback.

Why, what can I do?

Joe.

Aye, murderer, what can you do? Oh God of Justice, hear my prayer against this man who bears the blood guilt of my innocent child upon his wicked soul. I have made him rich and proud - let me make him poor and despised. He has mocked my tears - let me be as stone to him - may his own flesh and blood repay the wrongs he has inflicted on mine.

May I have him groveling in the dust before me with my heel - his master's heel, upon his neck, and when he ends his shameful life, of baffled greed, of misery, of pain, let him then pass on to the everlasting fires of Hell - of Hell. (Sobbing and trembling violently, falling back in chair, Lucy and Ray supporting him, Curdle is in window, Louderback down L. Nelson in door, Mrs. Louderback L.C.)

C U R T A I N .

" " " " " " " " " "

x Curdle.

x Nelson.

x Lucy.

x Joe.

x Ray.

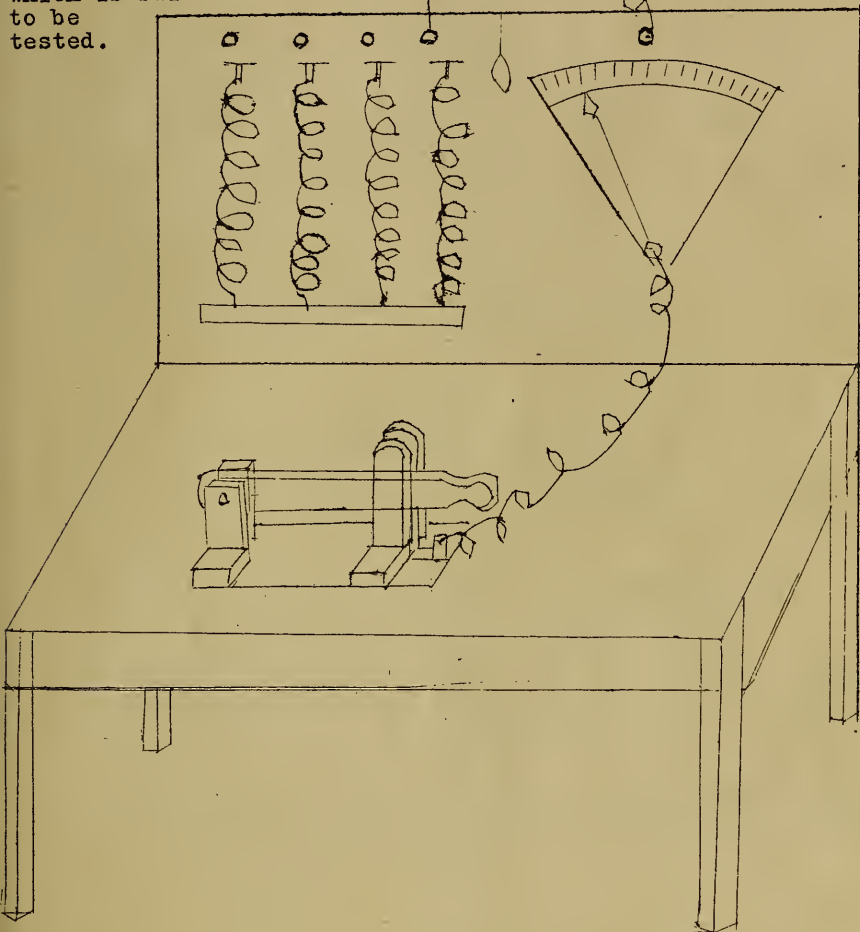
x Mrs. L.

x Louderback.

-----ooooo0000oooo-----

Same as Act 2.

Six months later. But the setting is bare and forlorn. The cosy furniture, piano, and pictures gone. Books out of the case, general appearance of poverty. At the back of stage covering window is a long table or stand which has a white enameled back to it, representing marble. In C. is a large electric globe, on sides of same are a number of coils of wire suspended, three of them arranged with fuses to blow out on cues, giving idea of over load. On the R. of stand is large switch, on L. of backing is a sector dial numbered up to ten thousand, dial should be large, and hand on same is worked behind marble backing by hand on cues. At side of table on floor or in slightly raised platform is a motor which can be wired up so as to run when switch is thrown in. (This is supposed to be a Booster to raise voltage of current which then goes to sample coils in switch board and through fuses which blow out. Wire at top marked A at head of dial which is switched to socket at head of each sample to be tested.



(At rise, Joe discovered at stand at back busying himself among the apparatus, pause - he turns to come down to table on the L. picks up several coils of insulated wires in succession. He is gaunt and wild eyed.)

Joe.

Useless, useless. Nothing like mica in insulating resistance and dielectric strength, and how many times mica has failed me. Fibre treated with shellac - (Bends it.) Ah: Crack: There you go - vulcabeston - nothing new about that. I - I won't give up, though, I won't - I won't. (Lucy enters L.U.E. she carries a basket.) Well, well, what did they say?

Lucy.

It's no use, father, they are all alike. They'll trust us no father. We have to go supperless to bed.

Joe.

Supperless to bed? What are you talking about, Lucy?

Lucy.

Why, the butcher and the grocerymen and the baker, they won't give us a cent's worth of credit.

Joe.

Never mind about them - I am not interested in mere food. What did they say at the power house - the light company?

Lucy.

Oh, they are about sending up a man to cut the connection.

Joe.

What - to-night?

Lucy.

Of course.

Joe.

Did you tell them how near to cussess I was?

Lucy.

Yes.

Joe.

And they--

Lucy.

They laughed at me and said you were insane.

Joe.

Go again- take no denial. I must use their power to-night. If they take it away, my labor of weeks will be lost. Go, my child, go - go.

Lucy.

Poor father: Wouldn't be better for you to give it up?

Joe.

Give it up? Lucy, have you forgotten your sister?

Lucy.

Forget Elsie? No. But let me tell you father, if Elsie were alive and with us to-day, and saw you undergoing privation, suffering, and looking as you are, she would advise you as I do.

Joe.

If she were alive, but she is not. Her murdered body is hidden by yonder river - but the people who sent her to her death, they still live - father and son - they live, and I will live also to punish them. Where is Raynor?

Lucy.

He is asleep, father.

Joe.

Asleep? Oh yes, yes, I forgot - he must be tired.

Lucy.

He has had no sleep for two nights, father, nor have you. You ought to try and get some rest.

Joe.

I want no sleep. I'll take no rest until my work is done.

3-N.

Lucy.

You can't keep this up forever.

Joe.

I'll keep it up long enough - long enough.

Lucy.

But suppose that you should break down - should die.

Joe.

I can't take the time to die until my work is done. But that electric light company - they must not shut me off to-night. To-night I may discover what will bring millions - millions. Rouse up Raynor, dear, rouse him up. We must work - we must work!

Lucy.

Poor father, is he mad as all the people say? (Exits R.)
(Joe busies himself at stand at back.)

Joe.

(Looking at coil of wire.) It would be strange if Raynor's theory is right, and this gum from the Philippines should be what I have longed for for years. It admits of all sorts of mechanical manipulation - unburnable as asbestos, impervious to water. Its dielectric strength and insulating resistance we must prove.

Curdle.

(Enters L.U.E.) Ahem:

Joe.

(Startled, throws over apparatus on stand.) Eh - Mr. Curdle.

Curdle.

Yes, good evening, Joe. Don't be alarmed, this is only a friendly call. I'm not here to try and steal any of your secrets. Ahem: (Coughs.) Well, how goes the good work? Have you made any new discoveries? How are your experiments getting on?

Joe.

Very promisingly, Mr. Curdle, promisingly, sir.

Curdle.

I have heard you say that same thing for twenty years, Joe, but somehow or other you don't seem to get there - that is - you don't get there for yourself, so to speak. You are one of those clever men, Joe, who do your best work when laboring for somebody else.

Joe.

I was one of those men, sir, but I am working now for myself.

Curdle.

Ahem: I myself have never lost faith in you, Joe, I have always been your friend. (Ingratiatingly.) I call myself now - the best friend you have in Philaopolis.

Joe.

Do you?

Curdle.

I do, Joe, and I can prove it.

Joe.

You can indeed, and right at this present moment.

Curdle.

(Warmly.) How, Joe, how?

Joe.

Lend me twenty dollars.

Curdle.

Ahem: (Coughs.) My friendship cannot be measured by the dollar standard, Joe. It is something beyond mere dirty money. I shouldn't like to put you under any obligation of that kind, Joe.

4-N.

Joe.

I wouldn't mind the obligation a bit.

Curdle.

You know it is against my principles to lend anyone money. You always lose a man's friendship when you lend him money.

Joe.

I assure you I couldn't feel less friendly to you than I do, if you loaned me twenty.

Curdle.

Ahem - I might advance you twenty - on condition -

Joe.

On condition of what?

Curdle.

If you discover the perfect insulation, I would have the option of buying your patent for say - a thousand dollars.

Joe.

No, no, I'll sell no more of my patents.

Curdle.

You're a good fellow, Joe, and I only want to do you a good turn. I know you are very hard up.

Joe.

(Looks at his ragged clothes and the barely furnished room) How did you ever find it out? Do you think we show it?

Curdle.

Now, I wouldn't mind advancing you a hundred dollars, if we can come to some arrangement.

Joe.

The only arrangements we could make would be for you to find capital to push my discovery and be satisfied with a fair return on the investment.

Curdle.

Preposterous! Where would I come in on such a deal?

Joe.

I would give you a salary as manager of my works.

Curdle.

Thank you - that is hardly enough. You seem to forget that I was managers for Louderback, and I threw that, and am manager for the present company with which I am connected.

Joe.

Yes, I know, "You are one of those clever men, Curdle, who do your best work when laboring for someone else.

Curdle.

(Coughs, pause.) What is the matter with us making a deal to work together? Partners, so to speak.

Joe.

No, I have a partner already - don't want any more. The best I can do for you is manager, you ought to consider it. If I succeed, your company will bust and you will be out of a job.

Curdle.

Why, who is your partner, Joe?

Joe.

Mr. Raynor Shine?

Curdle.

What capital has he to put into any of your schemes?

Joe.

Brains, honesty, hard work and every dollar he can scrape together.

Curdle.

He can't scrape much, I guess. And it takes lots of push and money to boom any invention. I made a great man of Louderback, and I could make a great man of you if you discovered anything tangible.

5-N.

Joe.

How about that twenty? I need it.

Curdle.

For food, Joe?

Joe.

Food! What an idea! Why, I live on the fat of the land, chicken every day and turkey on Sundays. You ought to have seen the dinner I had to-day. No, I want the twenty to stave off that Light Company. I am using their power in my experiments.

Curdle.

Yes, I know, I am interested there. You owe them a bill, and they asked me if I thought you were good for it.

Joe.

Of course you can tell them yes.

Curdle.

(Reprovingly.) I am a truthful man, Joe.

Joe.

Oh yes, I'm always forgetting that. Well, come again, some-time when I'm not so busy. (Knock on door L.U.E.) Come in.
(Louderback enters L.U.E.)

Louderback.

(Seeing Curdle.) Curdle!

Curdle.

(Aside.) Louderback: Ahem: Joe, not a word to him about our little affair.

Joe.

I don't want any words with him about any affair.

Curdle.

Give my very best respects to your sweet daughter, Miss Lucy. I regret not having seen her. Good evening, Joe. (Passes Louderback with supercilious air.)

Louderback.

(In low tone.) Viper!

Curdle.

You pauperized, plundering plutocrat, you pilfering politician, don't dare address me. (Exits L.U.E.)

Louderback.

Gurney, I am here to show you I don't bear any malice for your words to me, or for the fact that you left my employ. I hear you've got into very low water, and I've come to offer to take you back.

Joe.

I am in low water, Louderback, but I could never get so low as to work for you.

Louderback.

Let by-gones be by-gones, Gurney. You must realize now that it was madness for you to leave me after having been so faithful for so many years.

Joe.

Oh, you acknowledge I served you faithfully, eh?

Louderback.

I never said anything else. Now I am willing to sign a contract with you at double your former salary, and for a period of say five years, on condition that any little trifle you may discover in that time may belong to me. You see I am generous, Gurney.

Joe.

You are more than generous, you are reckless in your extravagance to the point of madness.

Louderback.

Well, what do you say?

Joe?

Consult your family physician at once. Pareris is most insidious. The impulse to squander money by one who has been accustomed to grip a dollar till the eagle screamed, ah, that is a bad symptom.

6-N.

Louderback.

I never knew you to indulge in vulgar jokes before. Your levity doesn't accord with your deplorable condition, and ill becomes you, considering the misfortunes that have come upon you. (Severely.) Don't you feel your daughter's death at all now?

Joe.

I am not shedding tears. My heart is dry and so are my eyes. I haven't time - I am engaged in my work. When that is done I shall remember that she is dead, and I'll send for you.

(Enter Lucy.) Did you nurse him, Lucy?

Lucy.

Yes, he'll be right out.

Joe.

Did you tell him about the Electric Light Company?

Lucy

Yes.

Joe.

That they refuse to trust us further?

Lucy.

Yes, that everyone refuses to trust us further.

Joe.

What did he say?

Lucy.

He's like you, father, he says "We'll go on with the work." Go to him - he wants to see you.

Joe.

Yes, yes. (Exits R.)

Louderback.

(Aside.) I'll talk to that girl. If he should chance to make the discovery, I mustn't let it fall into the hands of anyone else. Lucy, I just now begged your father to forget the past and return to work for me, and if he will do so, I will double his former salary.

Lucy.

That sounds kind in you, Mr. Louderback, but he won't do it.

Louderback.

If he doesn't, you will both starve. Be a sensible girl, Lucy. Give him a good talking to - it may bring him back to his senses. (Re-enter Joe with Ray R.) Gurney, think over what I said. I shall come back in half an hour for your answer. (Exits L.U.E.)

Joe.

Ray, isn't there some other way?

Ray.

No, this way is good enough. I'll stop at the Light office on my way back.

Lucy.

Where are you going, Ray?

Ray.

To visit a relative of mine.

Lucy.

A relative?

Ray.

Yes, my uncle.

Lucy.

I didn't know that you had an uncle here in Philaopolis.

Ray.

Well, I have.

Lucy.

Have you been to see him before?

7-N.

Ray.

Yes, several times, and it's vital that I see him again and at once.

Lucy.

Why?

Ray.

I want to separate him from some of his coin. I am going to find out how much "my time" is worth to him. I'll be back soon. (Exits L.U.E.)

Lucy.

(Surveys Joe who is sorting out the wires again.) Perhaps Mr. Louderback is right. It would mean comfort and rest in his old age, instead of beggary and work. I'll try. Father:

Joe.

Yes, Lucy, child.

Lucy.

Suppose you should fail again in your hopes?

Joe.

Oh, no, no, no.

Lucy.

What would you do then?

Joe.

Try again.

Lucy.

And fail again?

Joe.

(Doggedly.) No matter how often I fail, I'll keep on trying.

Lucy.

But we haven't anything left - all - all has gone, our books, the furnitures, pictures, the piano. Where would you get the money?

Joe.

Earn it, somehow, and - and -

Lucy.

Yes, and -

Joe.

Keep on trying.

Lucy.

But we should starve. Hear me father, I am the only child you have now. If you should find out this secret and make a big fortune, if you owned this whole city, you could only leave it to me, and I don't want it. I don't care to be rich, but I do want food and clothing, and many times lately, I haven't had enough to eat.

Joe.

Oh my darling, don't take my pluck away from me just at this point. I tell you I am on the eve of success - a few hours - only a few hours may show us the way to thousands.

Lucy.

Father, you have had this dream for years - years of toil, years of study - years of denial.

Joe.

Yes, and years of faith in myself, in my life's work. The years are not wasted, they will bear fruit - you shall see.

Lucy.

Oh father, if you have any love left for me, give up this hopeless struggle - give it up for both our sakes. Accept Mr. Louderback's offer.

Joe.

(Fiercely.) What - be his slave again - that man, the father of the serpent who tempted your sister out of her Eden of happiness and peaceful content? You would have me serve - enrich

8-N.

them, my Elsie's murderers? If Elsie would advise from the grave, she would not tell me what you do. She would not have these people harness my brains, shackle my self respect and mock my meekness under the rod. She would cry - "Go on, father, go on - to victory - make the brave fight, we will struggle together, we will starve together, and if Heaven in the end denies us our hope, we'll die together - beaten - but not disgraced."

Lucy.

I am thinking, father, more of you than of myself, but from this hour you'll never hear me complain. I will do the same as Elsie would have done, and share all your hopes and sorrows, and share them with a smile. Elsie's memory is precious to us both, but remember, father, she could not love you more dearly than I do.

Joe.

God bless you, my dear, God bless you. Be patient but for a little while, and never ask me to sell myself, and promise me one thing, never to take any help, money or assistance or advice from any of these Louderbacks.

Lucy.

I promise, father.

Joe.

Remember to hold that promise sacred, Lucy.

Lucy.

I will hold it sacred, father.

Joe.

Ray will soon return - I must prepare for him - we hold a great test to-night - a great - great test. (Exits R.)

Lucy.

He'll never give up, he will take no rest until he succeeds or is in his grave. (Knock on door L.U.E. Lucy goes to door, opens it, Mrs. Louderback enters.) Mrs. Louderback!

Mrs. L.

Yes, my child. (Looking around.) Your father isn't home.

Lucy.

(Indicating R.) He's in there.

Mrs. L.

Ah, still at his work. I have heard he hardly ever leaves it. My poor child, my poor Lucy, how pale and drawn you look.

Lucy.

Did you want to see father, Mrs. Louderback?

Mrs. L.

No dear, it would be of no use, he refuses to speak when he sees me on the street. He hates me because I am Nelson's mother, and Walter Louderback's wife. He can't tell that I loved your sister as much as if she had been my own daughter - and it would have been the sweetest joy to me if she could have lived and have married my son.

Lucy.

Ah, if she had only lived, and all that we can do is to cherish her memory.

Mrs. L.

And in doing that, we must not forget the duty we owe the living, Lucy, and that is why I am here, and I am going to speak plainly. The condition your father and yourself are in, is a matter of public comment. That is not just or right. I want you to accept a loan from me.

Lucy.

I cannot do it, Mrs. Louderback. I thank you for your kindness and bless you for it, but you and yours are the last people in this world from whom we could accept anything.

9-N.

Forgive me, I don't want to wound you - I know your goodness of heart, I know that charity, mercy and virtue dwell there - I wish your generous impulse could have its way, but it cannot be, it must not be.

Mrs. L.

Because your father has forbidden.

Lucy.

He has my promise.

Mrs L.

Your father and I serve the same maker. All his life has been that of a Godly man who finds the divine in all - the whole universe appealed to him, and his very existence has been an ideal of goodness, love and self sacrifice.

Lucy.

Elsie's love was a most bitter blow.

Mrs L.

If Elsie were alive and here, she would beg your father not to deny my wish to serve you. She would ask aid of the power of the most High that awakens the goodness in men, that kindles all aspiration - for all that appeals to the best in us is the voice of God calling - she would say to your father as I say to you - don't be deaf to the voice - Judge not, lest ye be judged.

Lucy.

I'm sorry, but--

Mrs L.

If you only knew how my heart bleeds when I look at your pallid cheek, the misery which surrounds you, your broken shoes, your - attire - Oh Lucy, let me do something. I don't want you to deceive your father, but - -

Lucy

(Gently) I wouldn't deceive him, never, never. Father has hopes that things will soon be better. (Laughs faintly) As you say, they can't be much worse. I am hoping with him. I must be loyal, you know. I want to be loyal, because with Elsie gone, gone forever, I am the only one to whom father can pour out his heart now, the only one. We have few friends now, only one in fact, Mr. Raynor Shine.

Mrs. L.

Oh that was the young man whom Nelson liked so much.

Lucy

Yes, I like him too, but I never let him see it.

Mrs. L.

No.

Lucy

No, I don't want to spoil him. I haven't had much experience, but this I know, it doesn't pay a girl to make a foot-stool of herself for a male brute to step on.

Mrs. L.

I don't think there is anything of the male brute about the young gentleman, or Nelson would not have been so fond of him. I am worried about Nelson. He has been down with the fever in the Philippines. (Pause) Lucy, if things don't improve - come to me, won't you? Say you will. (Curdle enters L.U.E.)

Curdle

(Closes the door after him) Ahem! (They both turn) Miss Lucy, may I come in?

Lucy

If you go outside and knock, you will probably be accorded that privilege.

Curdle

He, he! (Laughs) You are facetious, aren't you?

10-N.

Lucy.

Did you want to see father?

Curdle.

Not particularly - he always wants to borrow money of me. I saw him a while ago. My visit now is to you.

Mrs.

Don't forget, Lucy. Remember I'll never give you a moment's rest until you do what I want you to do. Good night, dear. (Kisses her.)

Lucy.

Good night, Mrs. Louderback. (Mrs. L. exits L.U.E.)

Curdle.

Humph: Well, the gall of some people makes me sick.

Lucy.

What is the matter with you, Mr. Curdle?

Curdle.

Why don't these Louderbacks let you alone? Haven't they brought misery enough to you and yours?

Lucy.

What do you wish to see me about, Mr. Curdle?

Curdle.

About something of great interest to you.

Lucy.

Ah:

Curdle.

And I may acknowledge of some interest to myself. Now I ~~don't~~ want you to receive the intelligence with decorum, and not let your happiness whirl you into any extravagance of expression.

Lucy.

Why, what has happened?

Curdle.

I have decided to change my condition, my single blessedness, so to speak. I intend to get married.

Lucy.

Married? Is it possible? Who is she?

Curdle.

Can't you guess?

Lucy.

No, I can't for the life of me guess what woman there is who would marry you.

Curdle.

Well, I can guess.

Lucy.

Oh, don't - somebody's fooling you. Don't be absurd. You must realize that if any girl says "yes" to you & she's doing it on a bet or some other nonsense.

Curdle.

Do you realize that the woman I am going to marry is yourself? Your father needs capital, I want a wife. If he discovers anything of value, we'll keep it in the family.

Lucy.

What? You marry me?

Curdle.

I guess yes.

Lucy.

You'll have to guess again.

Curdle.

Do not try by flouting flippancy to forget or falsify your forlorn condition. Naught but desperate destitution dwells in this domicile - as I said before, your father asked me for money.

Lucy.

Did you give it to him?

11-N.

Curdle.

No, gave him some good advice instead. I will now give you some. You must realize what a come down it would be for a man in my position to marry a girl in yours. The taint on your sister's name--

Lucy.

Oh you coward, you low lived coward, to attack the memory of the dead.

Curdle.

Now let me finish.

Lucy.

I will hear no more - out of this house or I will call my father. Say to him what you have said to me, and man to man, old as he is, he will answer your lie and punish you as you deserve. (Enter Ray with big basket.)

Ray.

What is the matter, Lucy?

Lucy.

Oh, Ray - Ray. Kick this creature out of here, won't you?

Ray.

Certainly, Lucy, I will take great pleasure in doing so, presently, but I have use for him just now. Come in, Mr. Louderback, come in. We can continue our conversation. (Louderback enters L.U.E.) Lucy, call your father.

Lucy.

What have you there? (Pointing to basket.)

Ray.

Oh, lots of good things. (Pulls out packages and wine bottles) We're going to have a little spread in honor of the event - canned goods and champagne - cheese and - (Pulls out another bottle.) And champagne - porterhouse and - (Another bottle) champagne - other edibles and - (Bus. with another bottle.) champagne. Call your father, Lucy, tell him the electric light company is all right.

Lucy.

What have you been doing?

Ray.

Eh ? Using my time to the best advantage. Speaking of time, tell your father the psychological moment has arrived.

Lucy.

What time is it, Ray?

Ray.

(Feels mechanically for watch.) Eh - I don't know exactly.

Lucy.

Isn't your watch going?

Ray.

Oh yes, in fact, it "has went." Please call your father.

Lucy.

Oh Ray - Ray. (Exits R.)

Curdle.

I will bid you good evening.

Ray.

Not yet, you have a good stiff kick coming before you leave, and I'll just make sure you don't leave before you get it. (Throws Curdle down L. locks the door L.U.E. puts key in pocket.)

Joe.

(Enters with coil.) Ray, I see you prepared this? (Indicating coil.) Lucy re-enters.)

Ray.

Oh yes, these capitalists are going to witness your demonstration of its worth. I have given Mr. Louderback some

12-N.

hint of what we propose to do, and he , arguing that every man has his price, immediately proceeded to try and bribe me to betray your secret. Louderback, you have a mean, dirty soul. I have waited for some years to tell you that - I embrace the opportunity now to inform you that a close study of your character and career convinces me that you are the most contemptible specimen of a white man it has ever been my misfortune to meet. You have a close second though in ~~that~~ that dyspeptic deacon at your elbow. Yes, you - I mean - (To Curdle.) You with the kick coming.

Curdle.

Kick? Kick me - a deacon? Rude ribald ruffian! I shall look to you, Joe, for protection.

Ray.

Yes, Mr. Louderback - you never guessed my identity, but my father was one of your many victims in days gone by. You juggled his fortune away from him, and put the stigma of crime upon an innocent man. You caused my mother to die of a broken heart - I had a bitter, half starved childhood because of you, and I had little to exist on save a legacy of hate. I came to this place to probe your record and put you where you belong, behind the bars. One of the leading newspapers of this country employed me, and I dropped the work because of your wife and son. I fight my battles for myself against you, but for this man here, Joe Gurney whom you would rob, I am going to fight you to a finish, and you'll find out I can fight like Hell.

Louderback.

Joe, I'll come and see you when you are alone. Make that man unlock that door, and let me out. (Joe has been arranging coils, pays no attention.)

Curdle.

Let me out too.

Ray.

No, you came here both of you by your own free will and without invitation - you shall leave when we're through with you, not before. Demonstrate, Joe, demonstrate!

Joe.

I have been at work on the discovery of a perfect insulation. I have samples of insulated wire from the leading manufacturers in the world purchased for this test. You gentlemen use them all, and are familiar with their resistance and dielectric strength. This first is Addison's No. 13 - watch the dial. (Bus. he fixes plugs, turns switches, motor buzzes.) Observe the Dubois Rhevstat, the booster can develop the current to ten thousand volts, but - (Fuse blows out) that insulator could never stand the voltage. You know Brown's Vulcabestor, that hasn't the hundredth part of the dielectric strength of something you shall see tested presently. (Bus. with plugs and switches as before, hand on dial, moves a little, fuse blows out.) Swift's vulcanized fibre, No. 8. (Bus. as before.) You see, these are the best known to the world. Now I have here a wire - almost like a thread, insulated with -

Ray.

(Coughs.) Ahem:

Joe.

A new discovery of mine. I have covered the wire with it.

Curdle.

(Excited.) With what, Joe, with what?

Joe.

Ah, that's the secret.

Louderback.

What do you expect to do with that?

13-N.

Joe.

Carry successfully all the voltage that can be mustered at the power house.

Louderback.

You are insane.

Joe.

Perhaps - however, we will make the test.

Louderback.

If you succeed -

Louderback.

Why, that means---

Ray.

It means that you and Curdle are both ruined men.

Louderback.

This is some trickery. (Joe adjusts plugs.)

Ray.

Watch the hand on the dial -- Louderback watch it - watch it - see it is going - going the limit. (The hand waveringly swings slowly around to the opposite side.) That hand is the hand of fate for your gentlemen, it points to your hopeless ruin on earth and your eternal agony and damnation in the world to come.

Louderback.

(Cries out.) Another test - another - another -

Joe.

Test it yourself, either direct or alternating current, it is no difference.

Curdle.

(Screams.) How do you know that voltage is genuine - why, if it is with that size of wire, motors may be made one sixteenth the size.

Ray.

Exactly, and of the same power. That's what Joe proposes to do - he'll drive all of you sharks who have lived on his brains off of business. You doubt the voltage, eh? Don't put the plug in the motor - hold it yourself - and you'll be sizzling on the devil's frying pan quicker than it takes to tell it.

Louderback.

That light - there - that globe! Connect it with that - it needs volts to develop its brightness. (Joe puts plugs in again.) (Light slowly grows gets bright and brighter) Ah, you have found it, you have found the perfect insulation. Now for its price, what do you want for it?

Curdle.

I'm in on this, Louderback, I'll bid against you.

Louderback.

I'll give every dollar I possess.

Joe.

Oh you will? For what?

Louderback.

For the secret of that insulation. Name your price - you have something to sell I want to buy.

Joe.

You buy - you'll buy what? You'll buy my body and soul. Will you buy back the thirty years I spent in your service? Will you buy back my dear dead Elsie from her grave in the river? Will you buy back my peace of mind, my wounded trust in my fellow man - you'll buy? No, I'll buy now. I'll buy you - I've bought you. Do you know the price I've paid for you? The slavish labor and brain fag of a life time - my hunger -

14-N.
my tears - my agony - my despair - the life of my child whom
you and yours drove to her death - that's what I've paid for
you, and now I've got you - I've got you.

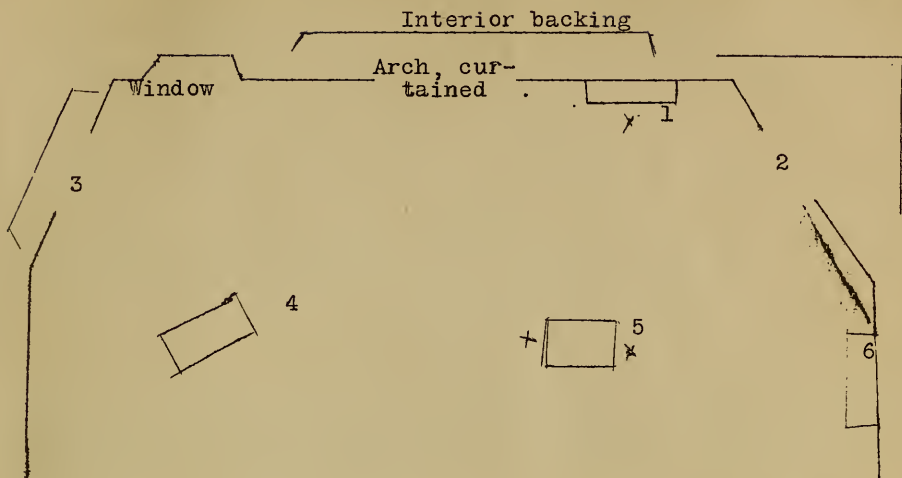
PICTURE

C U R T A I N.
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(Second Picture:---Joe is in chair L. of table, Lucy clasped
to his breast, Louderback down L. his head bowed, Ray has
Curdle by collar in door L.U.E. which is open.)

-----oooo0000oooo-----

Drawing Room at the Louderback Mansion. A handsome interior.



(1) Piano and stool. (2) Arch, curtained, conservatory backing. (3) Arch, curtained, interior backing. (4) Sofa. (5) Table and two chairs. (6) Fireplace. Large bay window up R. of C. at back. Fireplace with mantel, mirror and clock. Handsome decorative furniture, rugs, etc. Piano, bric-a-brac, pictures, statuary, etc. Table with chairs R. and L. down L. Sofa down R.

At rise: Louderback is discovered seated on sofa R. he is surrounded by suit cases, traveling bags, etc. He is nervously fingering the brim of his hat which he holds in his hand, and seems in a deep brown study. When curtain is well up, electric buzzer or bell heard off upper L. Pause. It is heard again. Pause. Louderback apparently does not hear the bell, pays no attention) (Sings in a melancholy tone

"My wife's gone to the country! (dolefully)

Hooray! Hooray! (Heaves prodigious sigh)
Curdle

(Enters R. of C. window) Ahem! Oh you're here! I rang four times, no answer - what's the matter with your servants?

Louderback

Servants?

Curdle

That's what I said, servants.

Louderback

I have no servants now. They all left three days ago.

Curdle

Oh yes, I might have known that. You will have no use or room for servants where you are going. Besides, when a man is as badly broke as you are -

Louderback

Yes - I am very badly broke, that's a fact.

Curdle

Still you might have answered my ring yourself, and not force one to enter the house through the window like a "porch climber."

Louderback

It will be good practice for your future, but now that you are here, what do you want?

Curdle

Of you? Why what have you that you could give me? When I look at you I only see an "old has been," discredited, disgraced, and eligible to the Down and Out Club. All I can get out of you is the pleasure of gloating over your condition. I like to gloat, you don't mind if I gloat.

Louderback

No - gloat and be - -

Curdle

Don't say it - oh, don't say it. Louderback you can well remember how your profanity always caused a cold shiver to pass through my spinal marrow, even when you were somebody. But now that you are nobody, a fossilized failure, a peevish, penniless pauper, on your way to be a destitute derelict on the ocean of life - why - profanity from one in your class to a gentleman in mine, is a freedom of familiarity which I must forbid.

Louderback

(Wearily) Curdle, I wish you'd let me alone. Why, why have you come here?

Curdle

Not to see you, you pulverized plutocrat. I am here to meet the new owner of this property, and pay him my respects.

Louderback

Well, he hasn't taken possession yet, whoever he may be.

Curdle

Whoever he may be! Do you mean to say you don't know who he is?

Louderback

No, I don't know, and I don't really care very much, although he's been kind enough to let my wife and myself remain here for some weeks. Mrs. Louderback decided though, we had better get out, and we're moving to-day.

Curdle

You don't know who he is?

Louderback

No. His lawyer refused to tell me when I asked him. I didn't ask him again.

Curdle

Ah! (Triumphantly) I know who he is. Aha! Your bloated pride is going to have another stab. I will take great pleasure in guiding the dagger home. Listen - the name of the man who succeeds you as owner here is Mr. Joseph Gurney. His agent, at the foreclosure, bought in the house, for him, Joseph Gurney - the "mwek as Moses" man. He is smiting you as Moses of old smote the Egyptian. He's going to pursue you until you land on the brink of perdition, and then he's going to push you off. He has the power, and according to your principles, the right. The "right of might." Aha, Louderback, what do you think of the "right of might" now?

Louderback

Curdle, you try to be diabolical, you're only tedious. Go away, please go away.

Curdle

You don't want to acknowledge how the news hurts you, you pretend to be stone, and you're only mush - mush. When Joseph Gurney arrives, as he will, to-day, you will see how he treats me. He recognizes my executive ability - he will undoubtedly offer me again the place of manager in the new works. Don't come to us for a job Louderback, I wouldn't give you four dollars a week. Oh, but you're in a pretty pickle. How the wheel of fortune has turned, and left you at the bottom. Your friend Senator Sorghum dead - Ah - you didn't know that. Why, it was in all the papers yesterday. Why you see you have nothing to hope for there -

Louderback

(to himself) Sorghum dead - dead! And the evidence he held - what - what will become of it - into whose hands will it - -

Curdle

What evidence! What was it he held -

Louderback

(In frenzy) Let me alone - let me alone, or I'll murder you - you fiend - you devil - out of my sight - out of here I say - (Grabs Curdle by throat, struggle - Mrs. Louderback enters hastily L.U.E.)

-3-P.

Walter! Walter! For mercy's sake -- stop! stop!

Louderback

(Throwing Curdle off) Then let that snake get out of my sight.

Mrs. Louderback

Go, Mr. Curdle, go. (Ray and Lucy enter at window)

Curdle

I will not go. You don't belong here any more than I do now, and you have no right to drive me out.

Ray

Curdle, when a lady tells a gentleman to go, the gentleman can always take his hat and go, but if he isn't a gentleman and insists that he shall stay, it behooves any real gentleman around to accelerate his departure. Curdle, if I have to kick you again, the shock will blacken ~~your~~ both your eyes.

Curdle

You don't own this house - you have no right --

Ray

Yes, I have, Curdle - the right of might. On your way Curdle - Skiddoo!

Curdle

I bow to your wish, Mr. Shine, because of your relationship to Mr. Gurney, but as for that "obsolete octopus" Louderback, I hated him in prosperity, in poverty he is still more loathsome to me. (Exit C)

Lucy

Mrs. Louderback! (Goes to Mrs. Louderback, offers both her hands)

Mrs. Louderback

Lucy - child! I heard of your marriage to Mr. Shine. I trust you will be most happy. (Draws Lucy up to her and kisses her forehead) Walter - I have just had two letters. One from Nelson - Walter, he is on his way home. This letter is from San Francisco, where he landed a week ago, and Walter, just think, where he was married.

Dmnes

Married!

Mrs. Louderback

Yes, married to the girl who nursed him through his long sickness, to the girl as he expresses it, who saved his life. They should arrive here to-day.

Louderback

Such a home coming - such a home coming - to want - to misery - to despair -

Ray

Pardon - Mrs. Louderback, but your son is unaware yet of--

Mrs. Louderback

Of our misfortune, yes. I could not find it in my heart to worry him with that.

Louderback

He must take his share of worry like us all. He won't have a fortune now - he must live with his bride on his pay - his bride! (laughs) Ha, ha, ha! (Suddenly) Do you know Sorghum is dead?

Mrs. Louderback

Yes, I was going to speak of it. I have a letter from Dulcie here, that is the other letter I mentioned.

Louderback

(Bitterly) Do you know what his death means to me? Ah well - you will soon learn. This loss of fortune is nothing - nothing -

Mrs. Louderback

Patience! Walter! Patience!

Louderback

Patience - Do you talk of patience to the poor wretch who is caught in the quicksand, and is sinking, sinking, no hope of escape - Forgive me, dear, you don't understand. You are a noble woman, the best of wives - I - I - If God would listen to the prayer of one so unworthy as I, I'd beg Him to bless you, dear - I - I want to be alone - pardon me for leaving you - I - (Grabs Mrs. Louderback in his arms, kisses her. Exits quickly R. Ray follows after him)

Mrs. Louderback

Why would he not listen to Dulcie Sorghum's letter - it concerns him the most of it. (Reads) "Dear Mrs. Louderback: You have learned by this ~~at~~ time of poor Papa's death. Before the end came he entrusted me with a packet of papers for your husband, and charged me to send them to him immediately. I am obeying him. Believe me, in my own great sorrow I can still think of, and sympathize with you in yours. Lovingly, Dulcie Sorghum." (Voices of Louderback and Ray heard)

Ray

I say - you shall not - think of your wife - your son.

Louderback

I must escape - I must, man - I must. (Noise of struggle) (Louderback and Ray enter R. They are struggling for the possession of a pistol. Ray finally wrests it from Louderback who exhausted, falls on sofa R. sobbing) - Cruel! - Cruel! To force a man to live when he wants to die.

Mrs. Louderback

(Kneels to him) Walter! Walter! Look at me - speak to me -

Louderback

Yes - I know - I know -

Mrs. Louderback

Poverty is not the worst of things, Walter, I will endure it with a smile.

Louderback

Will you endure disgrace? Do you know that Sorghum's death puts me within the shadow of a prison's walls? Wouldn't you rather be my widow, than a felon's wife?

Mrs. Louderback

Ah, he is mad - mad -

Louderback

If they thought me mad, they might have pardoned my crime. I, the catspaw of these politicians. You have read what happened in Illinois. They will need a scape goat now. Sorghum has hounded me for years - yes, and bled me - helped to ruin me, and now others will take up his work.

Mrs. Louderback

Think not of self murder, but read Dulcie's letter and take this packet sent you by the Senator on his death-bed. (Forces it on him)

Louderback

Packet sent by Sorghum? (Tears it open, going over papers) The proofs of my guilt! His conscience in his last hours made him assure my safety, and I - I was cursing his very memory. There's some mercy left in his blackguard world after all. (Pause) I thank you, Mr. Shine, you stayed my hand, just now - I thank you, sir - I thank you. (Crosses over nervously to fireplace, strikes a match, lights papers, holds them while they burn)

Mrs. Louderback

What are you doing, Walter.

Louderback

Slaying a ghost that has haunted me for years, getting rid of the incubus that has weighed me down and strangled all good impulse. (Joe enters C. Curdle following) My wife - Angel of goodness, you true comforter in affliction, I will face poverty as you are willing to do, with a smile. From now on I will live the life which you advise, and trust that my future acts will gain for me some portion of forgiveness for the past. (Pause) (Sinks in L. chair by fire)

Curdle

Joe! Joe! (Plucking him by the sleeve) Never mind about him, hear what I have to say. (Joe is intently watching Louderback who is down L. seated by fire. Mrs. Louderback kneeling in front of table looking up in his face. I.E. They are ignorant of Joe's presence) Joe, won't you listen to me?

Joe

To what end?

Curdle

That I may justify myself.

Joe

I tell you that I have the absolute proofs that you are the scoundrel who lured old Markham's daughter from her home. Her death is at your door. You have blighted her father's life - can you justify that?

Curdle

I didn't intend it, Joe, it was all the woman's fault. You see Joe, I am one of those men whose youth has been constrained, I had no chance to sow my wild oats then, and now that I am in years, I'm what they call an easy mark.

Joe

When Markham learns you are the man, he will seek your miserable life.

Curdle

What! Do you think he will be - be - sanguinary?

Joe

It will be my duty to tell him - to tell the world what a villain you are.

Curdle

I am not a villain, Joe, I am simply a "trifler" - that is all, a "trifler."

Joe

You had better leave here at once, for the rest, I forbid you ever addressing me again, in any manner. (Turns away to Lucy)

Curdle

But -

Ray

You heard what Mr. Gurney said. He means it.

Curdle

Say, in the language of the common herd, you are always "butting in," just as I am getting ready to say something, or do something. Once for all, for the rest, I forbid you ever addressing me again in any manner. Very well, I'll go - I'll leave Philaopolis, but I'll come back. Oh yes, I'll come back. You can't keep a good man down. (Exit C)

Louderback

Mr. Gurney, I have learned to-day for the first time, that you are the purchaser of this property. I want to thank you for your kindness and generosity in permitting us to remain so long, and I gladly yield possession.

Joe

It was nothing - nothing.

Louderback

Your prayers for success and power, and my complete financial ruin have come true - the wheel of fortune has turned for both of us, and reversed our positions.

Joe

And yet I do not feel the exultant thrill at that change that people might suppose I feel. I would give every dollar I possess, and gladly be the humble worker that I was, if I could only call my daughter back to life, and hold her next my heart again. I dreamed the other night she was alive, and we were here together in this room, and I said "Elsie! Elsie! This is your home, all yours, do you hear me, dear. Now what shall we do to your enemies? They are in my power, their very bread is mine, to give or to refuse. Shall I crush them? Shall I humble them to the dust? Shall I strike them down or shall I have mercy? Guide me now, tell me - what shall I do?" And as I spoke she ~~xxx~~ seemed to fade away from my view, but her sweet voice came as from a far off, "vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, vengeance is mine. Forgive father, forgive" and Mr. Louderback, I do forgive.

Louderback

Mr. Gurney, I -

Joe

One moment, my forgiveness means more than mere lip service. I could never use this house myself. It is far too grand for me. I shall remain in the old cottage still, Ray and Lucy are going to travel and see the great world. Mrs. Louderback, this mansion I shall put in your name. Mr. Louderback, if you wish to manage my works, the position is yours.

Louderback

I am unworthy - I don't deserve---

Joe

Let me have my way. Revenge is the most futile of all passions. The one who feels it, suffers more than the object of his resentment. Besides, if your pride still galls you, you can lay this unction to it, that one near and dear to you helped your undoing, and assisted us in the great discovery of insulations.

Louderback

One near and dear to me?

Ray

Your son, Nelson, who sent from the Phillippines to me, samples of a certain gum which we combined with other elements, and solved the puzzle.

Louderback

My son - Ah, it is fate - fate.

Curdle

(Rushing on) I told you, I'd come back - Joe - your -

Nelson

(Outside) It's all right, we'll find them -

NJoe

(Starts) Ah!

Mrs. Louderback

It's Nelson! My boy - my boy - he's back - come back to me -

Curdle

There's a lady with him, Joe.

Lucy

His bride - he wrote of.

Joe

His bride!

Mrs. Louderback

Yes, he was married last week in San Francisco.

NJoe

His bride - and he's bringing her here - and my poor child who died because of him - -

Lucy

Father! Father! (Clinging to him)

Ray

Joe! (Endeavoring to restrain him)

Joe

(Throws them both off) Away! Away! (Faces Nelson who enters C)
At last! Where is she - this wife you've married. Bring her to me, you devil - I want to tell her what you are, the truth about you and yours.

Nelson

You shall! (At C. reaches off, leads Elsie on)

Elsie

Father! (Joe sees her, falls back, dazed, holds out hands gropingly quite long pause. She goes to him, nestles in his arms, repeats "Father")

Joe

Elsie! Elsie! (Sobbing, embracing her)

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